Land Use

GOAL FOR 2020

Use and preserve land resources responsibly to enhance our environment and quality of life and accommodate growth, now and for future generations.

"Land is a precious resource to be treasured, not a commodity to be squandered. Land is unique for its physical features (hills, valleys, waterways), the life it supports (plants, wildlife, and humans), and for its immovable nature… It is because of its uniqueness that land creates a sense of place and a feeling of connection to the rest of the earth…Truly, we do not inherit the land from our forebears as much as we hold it in safekeeping for our descendants."

— "Land Recycling and the Creation of Sustainable Communities", California Center for Land Recycling, 1998

Today's Issues

Land is a finite natural resource and literally provides the physical foundation for the state's built and natural environment. Our land supports our homes, schools, stores, industries, hospitals and public facilities…our communities. Our land also includes our farms, parks, open space and wildlife habitats.

Historically, there has been substantial conflict over what lands should be developed, what land should be preserved and how we should steward all our lands. California is projected to grow by 12 million people over the next 20 years which poses substantial new challenges for land use decision-making. We need to plan better so that we use land most efficiently to build quality places and preserve our important natural assets.

STEWARDSHIP

California has a long-standing tradition of environmental leadership as exemplified by our State commissions and conservancies that protect Lake Tahoe, our parks, our coast, prime agricultural lands and other important land resources. However, we face many challenges in the stewardship of our natural resources. Past land use practices have led to the loss of important assets and contamination of our lands, watersheds and coastal areas.

"The future of California looks very different from the past and therefore the future of planning and development must look very different as well."

"Land Shortage Will Change How We Grow"
William Fulton,
April 4, 2001

Some California Land Use Facts:

- **Several regions with the greatest predicted population growth—Los Angeles, Orange and Santa Clara counties—will lack sufficient vacant lands to accommodate projected household growth through 2010 based on current development patterns.**
- **Between 1970 and 1990 the population of Los Angeles grew by 45%, but the developed land area grew by 200%.**
- **In San Diego, older neighborhoods average 5.5 houses per acre, while current plans for development allow for 2.4 units per acre.**
- **Estimates for providing infrastructure to Central Valley cities through 2040 with current low density development patterns indicate a $1 billion deficit.**
- **The empty and contaminated lots and abandoned buildings in inner cities and older suburbs, called brownfields, are estimated to constitute 5–10% of California's urban real estate (260,000 to 520,000 acres).**
- **California is converting an average of 42,500 acres of agricultural land and open space to urban uses each year.**
- **Over the past 100 years, more than 90% of California wetlands have been lost, with negative impacts on water quality, flood protection, and habitat.**
- **Currently, 5% of California's land mass is urbanized.**

PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF LONG BEACH

Livingston Park
Long Beach, California

Brownfields are under-utilized assets and negatively impact the community. Agriculture must have land resources to be sustained economically. Healthy watersheds are critical for habitat, water quality and supply; clean beaches and rivers are important recreation assets. We need to improve our use and management of resources on both publicly and privately owned lands. To do so, we need better data and improved science and practices. Today's stewardship provides the legacy for the future.

INEFFICIENT DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Current development patterns are characterized by relatively low density and dispersed distribution of housing, commercial buildings and other facilities. One manifestation is that jobs and housing are not close to one another, resulting in long commutes, diminished family time, and increased costs for families and businesses. At the same time, disinvestments in the urban core of many of our major cities and older suburbs wastes prior investments and impairs economic growth. There is adequate land to accommodate growth in existing communities and on undeveloped and environmentally appropriate lands, but only if we use our land more efficiently.

POOR PLANNING AND CONFLICTS OVER DEVELOPMENT

PHOTO CREDIT: D. MCCULLOH/GEOGRAPHICS

Sunny Mead Ranch
Moreno Valley, California

Economic and population growth creates intense competition for land. Poor planning results in conflicts between development and conservation needs. Local and regional land use planning is often not coordinated with planning for housing, water, transportation, and other key areas. Approximately one-third of our cities and counties have not developed a plan or policy for growth in their General Plans in the last 10 years. Thus, these areas may be unprepared to deal with future growth. Though better planning is a high priority, many communities lack sufficient resources to update General Plans and participate in integrated regional planning.

The implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is sometimes used inappropriately to prevent needed development. Citizen concerns about growth and environmental impacts have led to initiatives to limit growth, often called "ballot-box planning." This situation dilutes the ability of public officials to provide policy direction and the ability of local governments to plan effectively for the future.

The State Role in Land Use

The State plays an important role in broadly determining the character, pace and location of development and conservation in many ways, such as:

- Tax policies that set a framework for how local governments make land use decisions
- Setting the process rules for local and regional agencies in land use planning for housing, transportation and natural resources protection; for how school districts plan and site new schools; and for how cities and special districts are created and annex land
- The planning, building and funding of public facilities, such as freeway and rail corridors, colleges and universities, schools, water projects, courts, hospitals, and prisons
- Directly regulating activities affecting State-owned lands or unique natural or economic resources, such as the California coastline, water quality, and sensitive habitats
- By providing incentives and a framework for local governments to engage in regional planning and comply with State General Plan guidelines
- By purchasing and managing important lands

The Local Role in Land Use

Local governments have a strong role in land use planning and decision-making, as reflected by the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance processes. The Housing and Land Use Elements which set community housing production and land use targets, are core components of the General Plan. To ensure the best use of land resources, the local role should include:

- Developing strong community consensus for sustainable growth
- Reflecting community consensus in the General Plan and Capital Improvements Program (CIP)
- Participating in regional consensus building for sustainable growth
- Forming partnerships with other government and non-government organizations to solve regional problems
- Planning proactively to avoid ballot box planning, which often inadvertently moves one jurisdiction's problems to another jurisdiction
- Investing in older neighborhoods and central city areas

PHOTO CREDIT: R. HOLMES/CALIFORNIA TECHNOLOGY, TRADE AND COMMERCE AGENCY

Heavenly Valley, Lake Tahoe, California

CASE STUDY

Private Sector Preservation of Sensitive Lands: Hidden Ranch, California

Hidden Ranch is an 807-acre parcel located in Black Star Canyon between Irvine and Corona in Orange County, which is under intense pressure for development. The site is home to various natural species of plants and animals that a private investment firm is interested in preserving. In a new model of land conservation, the Laguna Beach group will receive conservation credits for dedicating Hidden Ranch as a preserve, then sell the credits to public agencies and developers that need them to offset planned construction on other sensitive lands. The National Audubon Society will manage the preserve and investors will ensure a $1 million endowment over the next five years.

Source:
F. Scott Richard
Los Angeles Times,
May 14, 2001

Actions Taken

- **In 2000, at the recommendation of this Commission and with the support of the Governor and the Legislature, more than $4 billion in parks and water bonds were placed on the ballot and approved, constituting the largest such state investment in the nation's history (Propositions 12 and 13).**
- **Governor Davis sponsored legislation for an $85 million low-interest loan program for the Cleanup Loans and Environmental Assistance to Neighborhoods (CLEAN) program, administered by the California Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Toxic Substances Control. The California Pollution Control Financing Authority received $10 million targeted for projects in at-risk communities.**
- **In 1999, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation launched a five-year, $175 million California initiative to conserve open space, farmland, and critical natural areas.**
- **The State Treasurer is implementing a new $2.5 million Smart Growth grant program to assist fiscally constrained local governments to build planning capacity for sustainable development.**
- **Over $230 million dollars has been allocated for the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank which will leverage approximately $565 million in loans.**

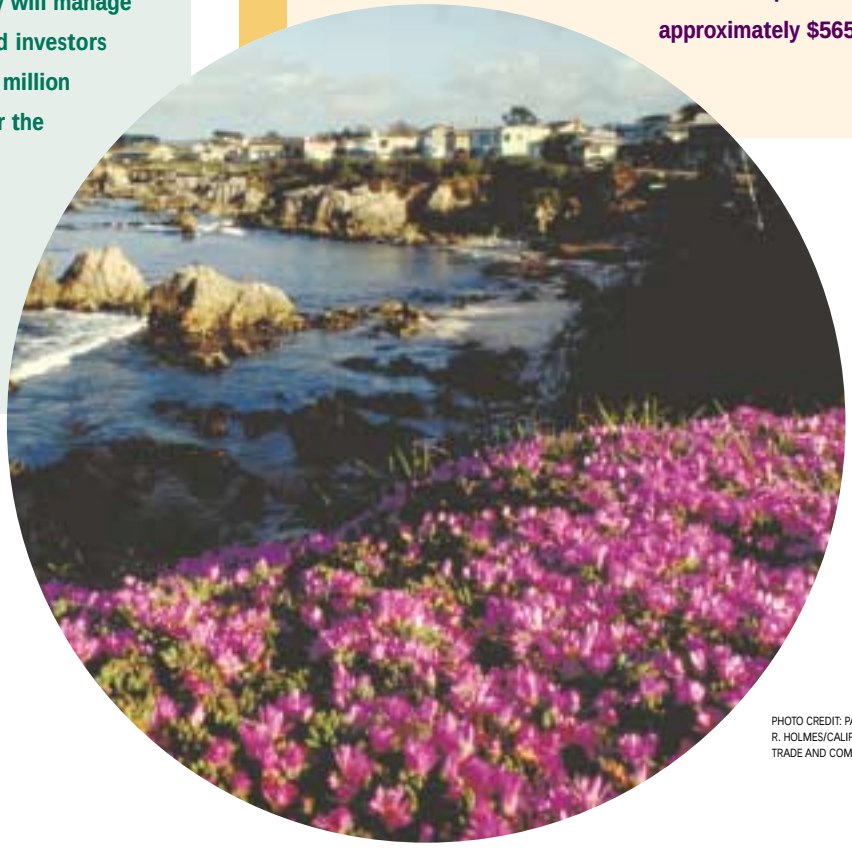

PHOTO CREDIT: PACIFIC GROVE,
R. HOLMES/CALIFORNIA TECHNOLOGY,
TRADE AND COMMERCE AGENCY

Investing for California's Future

The Commission has identified the following priorities for meeting our land use needs:

- *Increased commitment to stewardship*
- *Reform of the State-local fiscal structure*
- *Increased efficiency of land use through cleanup of contaminated lands, better community design and new models of development in existing and new communities*

PHOTO CREDIT: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

- *Support for integrated local and regional planning in conjunction with updated General Plans*
- *Improved science, data systems and practices for using and managing land resources*
- *Use new models for responsible development, where environmentally appropriate*

Recommended Options

The following recommended options will help achieve our priorities:

FINANCING AND FISCAL POLICY

- Reform the State-local fiscal relationship to provide incentives for communities to make better long-term land use decisions. Incentive options include: swap State-share property tax for local-share sales tax; cap the 1992 property tax shift, with economic triggers; and/or regional tax revenue sharing.
- Increase State funding for brownfield cleanup and reuse initiatives.

CASE STUDY

Regional Integrated Planning: Riverside County, California

Riverside County Integrated Plan (RCIP) is a three year comprehensive, integrated planning effort to determine future conservation, transportation, housing and economic needs in Riverside County. This innovative project, the first of its kind in the nation, was developed as a response to the impact of rapid growth on the County's quality of life. Guiding principles are: project elements are related and integrated; financing is everyone's responsibility; and the process is stakeholder rather than government driven. The project simultaneously addresses what traditionally have been three separate planning efforts in the areas of conservation, transportation and land use, using a consensus rather than a traditional conflict model. RCIP will protect the natural environment, including watersheds, by conserving habitat and open space through a Multi-Species Habitat Plan. Traffic congestion will be addressed though the Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process, a multi-modal effort. RCIP will balance land use by updating the County's General Plan.

Source: RCIP 2000

CASE STUDY

Sustainable Planning: Bay Area Regional Livability Footprint Project

The Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development—made up of over 40 Bay Area public, private and nonprofit organizations—and the five regional agencies led by the Association of Bay Area Governments, have been working together since 1999 to develop a region-wide, bottom-up process to create a sustainable smart growth land use vision for the Bay Area. In Fall 2000, they merged the public outreach portions of their projects. Together, this ground-breaking partnership is planning a series of workshops throughout the Bay Area, beginning in September 2001. Their workshops will use PLACE³S—a desktop GIS model developed by the California Energy Commission—to map land use decisions. The goal of these workshops is Bay Area-wide consensus on the best ways for the region to accommodate projected growth and the fiscal and regulatory incentives local governments, developers, neighborhood groups and others need to support these new development patterns.

Source: Association of Bay Area Governments

IMPROVED PLANNING

- Provide matching funds and technical support to help communities update General Plans within the next five years, consistent with state standards and guidelines.
- Provide incentives for collaborative, integrated regional and sub-regional planning initiatives linked to sustainable development criteria and State General Plan guidelines, such as the Riverside Comprehensive Integrated Plan process.
- Build the planning capacity of local government and regional agencies through better state data, technical assistance, and planning grants.
- Continue funding of the Resources Agency's California Continued Resources Investment Strategy Project (C-CRISP) to support responsible planning for investments in our infrastructure.
- Adopt State inter-agency planning models, such as the Tri-Agency Partnership on Environmental Permitting for Transportation, and build upon them to collaborate with regional and local planning agencies.
- Fund landscape-scale planning for natural resource conservation, such as multi-species Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and the Natural Communities Conservation Planning (NCCP) process.

PHOTO CREDIT: D. WINKLER/CITY OF HUNTINGTON BEACH

Interpretive education assists students in understanding the value of protecting limited natural resources through habitat conservation planning

PHOTO CREDIT: 2001 DAVID SANGER

Crissy Field, San Francisco
Before and After

BARRIER REMOVAL

- Use scientifically accepted standards to govern brownfield assessment and cleanup.
- Streamline the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other permitting processes to promote responsible land use planning while ensuring that the original intent of protecting the environment is maintained.

IMPROVED IMPLEMENTATION AND USE

- "Green" our cities through investments that optimize our use of energy, water, and other resources. Improve livability of urban areas by development of urban parks, recreation areas and other amenities.
- Provide funding and support for best practices in zoning and building codes so communities can achieve more efficient land use and adopt new models of development, such as mixed-use and transit-oriented development.
- Develop framework Geographic Information System (GIS) data sets, such as roads, typography, land cover, hydrography and imagery for use by state, regional and local government entities.
- Develop and implement a State watersheds policy to guide and partner with regional watershed conservation and development plans.
- Increase solid waste treatment capacity through conservation, recycling, and new technologies.
- Continue to purchase critical land for the State parks and natural reserves and to ensure these resources are appropriately maintained.

CASE STUDY

Greening our Cities: Crissy Field Conversion, San Francisco, California

Crissy Field, part of the former Presidio Army base, was for years a 70-acre parcel of asphalt, aging barracks, and chain link fences along the bay, east of the Golden Gate Bridge. Through private contributions and civic volunteers, Crissy Field, now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, has been brought to life as an urban park in one of the largest urban ecological restorations ever. The Army removed 87,000 tons of contaminants; 70 acres of asphalt and concrete were crushed and used as fill for new pathways and parking lots. Volunteers replanted the area with native plant species, and re-created a salt marsh. More than 100 bird species have been sighted, some that haven't been seen in that area for 100 years. The conversion was led by the nonprofit Golden Gate National Parks Association with an $18 million donation from the Haas Family Funds. The family trust worked in partnership with the community and the National Park Service to create a resource for all of the Bay Area's diverse communities.

Source: Marilee Enge
San Jose Mercury News
April 17, 2001